AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

OF THE

DENTAL DEPARTMENT

IN

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

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BY

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ADDRESS.

Mr. President and Gentlemen :—The fulfillment of good intentions, it is to be feared, is but a rare occurrence in our lives, and I hold myself to be exceptionally fortunate in that a long desired project has been carried out by this visit to America; and I feel that I owe a lasting debt of gratitude to the Dental Faculty of Harvard University for supplying the stimulus which induced me to break away from the trammels of practice, and present myself here.

For, at the time when the invitation to deliver your commencement address reached my hands, my project of visiting America had not assumed any tangible form, and was in a fair way never to be executed; but the compliment thereby proffered was one which I felt I could hardly decline, so that I can say, in all sincerity, that I have crossed the Atlantic in order to enjoy the honor and the pleasure of addressing you here to-day.

And, whilst this honor, no less than the most cordial reception accorded to me, cannot but be a source of life long gratification to me individually, there is a satisfaction far transcending any which could be afforded by any mere personal compliment, in the fact that we recognize in your invitation a pledge of amity and good fellowship towards my countrymen, of whom I am but the unit that chances to be here. And, whilst the welcome received by my friend and colleague, Mr. Turner, and myself, has given us a gratification which words are inadequate to express, I trust and believe that the time is not far distant when our meetings will be an every day matter, and I most cordially echo the words of a recent speaker, at New York, who hoped that ere long such a reception as that accorded to us would be altogether out of date; a sentiment which you happily express when you term the wide Atlantic "The Ferry." Yet, flattered and happy as I cannot but feel at the circumstances

which attend our meeting in this place, it is with no great confidence that I approach my task; for, apart from the intrinsic difficulty which surrounds the framing of an address, it is but a year since you had the good fortune to listen to the words of one whose genial humor and happy language are co-extensive with the English tongue, and it is indeed no hopeful task to follow on the track over which the facile pen of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes has passed.

On that occasion the claims of dental surgery were set forth in some detail; but, even though it is to this cause that we owe the utterance of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes' address, the very existence of claims not yet fully recognized is a thing which the dentist neither can, nor ought to, view with complacency.

Rash indeed would he be who fancied that he could supplement that exposition of our claims; but it is left for us to enquire how we can get them satisfied, and win for the leaders of our profession that homage which is ungrudgingly, and indeed unconsciously, accorded by the public to preeminence in other learned professions. And there is much left for us to do; we have to convert the dental profession into a body of highly educated men, commanding respect alike by their conduct and acquirements, from whose ranks the ignorant and incompetent shall be rigorously excluded. Until we can say that it is so, each day that passes by and leaves us associated, even though it be but in name, with ignorant charlatans, is a fresh reproach to us. Full well may we cry,

> "I do not know
> While yet I live to say 'This thing 's to do;'
> Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means,
> To do 't."

So soon as we can point to our profession as being a coherent body of men duly qualified by study and tested by examination, our claims will need but little urging.

> "None are, for being what they are, in fault,
> But for not being what they would be thought,"

might aptly have been spoken of the dental profession, and this lies at the root of that lack of appreciation which galls us all so sorely.

Let us make it what we would have it thought—a guarantee of education and acquirement, and we shall have little left to complain of.

Such an elevation of the dental profession as that for which we are striving is only to be effected by unanimity; such an unanimity as is, I venture to hope, foreshadowed by the fact that I, an alien, have been invited to address you here on the occasion of your formal admission to the ranks of that profession.

And in the firm belief that each year will knit us more closely together in the bonds of fellow feeling, I will endeavor to enlist your sympathies with your European brethren; and I do not know that I can better embody the position of dental surgery in England than by giving a brief account of our diploma and its establishment.

Before a student can present himself for examination, he must have been engaged for four years in the acquirement of professional knowledge—the first two years of this time being usually spent in the laboratory and operating room of some established dentist, and the last two in attendance upon hospital practice. The dental practice and special courses of dental lectures at some recognized dental hospital, and the anatomical and surgical instruction at some general hospital, must be attended during the same period of two years.

Hence, it happens that our students for the most part attach themselves to two hospitals, generally selecting for their anatomical and surgical studies those general hospitals which are situated nearest to the dental hospital, and in passing through these courses become associated with the students who intend to practice medicine and surgery. And I am proud to be able to say that the anatomical and surgical prizes at some of our leading medical schools have been carried off by students of the dental hospital, and that, after a tolerably extensive experience of medical students, I find that our dental students contrast very favorably with the others, both in respect to diligence and ability—an experience which is fully borne out by that of our medical teachers.

At the completion of the term of study comes an examination, conducted, partly by written papers, and partly *viva voce*, before a board of examiners, consisting of three surgeons and three dentists,

the student being examined by the surgical section of the board in anatomy and surgery, and by the dental section in the matters more strictly appertaining to our specialty.

Thus, both in the course of study and the final examination, the fact that dentistry is a branch of surgery, is kept prominently in view; and not only is the future dentist associated with students of medicine during his studies, but his examination is conducted and his diploma conferred by the Royal College of Surgeons—a body of the highest standing—which takes no part in medical education beyond prescribing what the curriculum shall be; and I am inclined to attach some importance to this complete independence of the examining body.

In England there is but one dental diploma, and this is not conferred by any of our Universities; to Harvard, then, be all honor, as the first to institute a dental department, and thus to assume the true function of a university, as a pioneer in education and a promoter of knowledge—putting to shame our old Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where natural science has but just fought its way to a tardy recognition, and the study of medicine languishes beneath a cold neglect.

After the qualification has been obtained, its holder very generally makes his entry into private practice by becoming an assistant to, or partner with, some older practitioner; but should he elect to establish a practice for himself, the chief source of patients will be the recommendations of those medical men who have formed a favorable opinion of his diligence and abilities during his student days.

It may, perhaps, interest you to hear of some few points in which our manner of conducting practice differs from that pursued in America, and I do not think I shall find a more favorable moment for speaking of it than the present.

In the earlier part of the present century, dental, and indeed all medical, practice, was conducted with no small amount of ceremony and formality, it being usual for the dentist to dress himself in evening costume. It was, moreover, held to be essential that the rela-

tions between the dentist and his patient should be of a confidential character, and so far was this carried that it was considered undesirable to show more than one patient into the same waiting room, so that it would sometimes happen that every room in the dentist's house would be thus occupied, and his family driven up, step by step, into the attics.

Such extreme formality and secrecy as existed fifty years ago has of course passed away, but not without leaving its mark upon the conduct of our practice, and there are many of our patients who object to the presence of an assistant, and some who much prefer even their own friends to be absent from the room; and I do not think that English patients would tolerate the free communication between the waiting room and the operating room, which I find so usual in America. Another point of difference, in which also we are trammeled by traditional usage, is that of fees. In days of yore, when, as Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes most aptly expressed it "traffic and agriculture were scorned by the descendants of the Norman robbers," it was considered derogatory to receive payment for any service rendered, so that the bestowal of the honorarium was done more or less privily; and a relic of this feeling survives in the fact that physicians, formerly regarded as the undoubted chiefs of the medical profession, are to this day, of their own free will, unable to recover their fees in a court of law.

English patients commonly offer a fee of one guinea, without asking any questions, for each operation, and the existence of the diffidence on the question of fees, to which I have just alluded, renders it distasteful, and to many of us practically impossible, to enter into any discussion upon the subject, and to appraise the value of our own services. Thus it by no means uncommonly happens that an inadequate fee is accepted, rather than face the unpleasantness of discussing such a topic with the patient, and this uniform fee cannot but discourage the operator from performing very protracted operations, which are consequently less frequently performed in England than in this country. A change is, however, being gradually effected in this matter, and as systematized dental

education increases every year the number of skilled operators, doubtless the fees will become more strictly proportioned to the time and labor expended. But in effecting such a change, as indeed in everything else, we are hampered by the existence of a large body of unqualified men, styling themselves dentists, and we unfortunately are not as yet able to obtain any legislative interference to prevent such from practicing.

Indeed, in this respect we are behind America, for I learn that you are able in this country, at least in certain States, to obtain the infliction of a fine upon those who profess the possession of diplomas which they have never obtained, while in England we are still utterly powerless in this matter.

And what is still more to be regretted, there are some few capable and respectable pratictioners who do not hold any diploma at all, though I fancy that their number is greatly overestimated. To explain how this has happened, it will be necessary to briefly sketch the history of the establishment of the diploma.

Before the year 1859, no degree in dental surgery had been established in England, so that our dentists were either fully qualified surgeons, or held no qualification at all.

As must always be the case on the introduction of any important measure, a considerable amount of fierce opposition was raised up, both in the ranks of the dental profession, and, to a less extent, in those of the medical profession ; one of the features of the scheme, most violently opposed by the dentists being the close association of dentistry with surgery, both in the curriculum and in the examination.

The result of this opposition was the formation of the self-styled College of Dentists, which undertook the work of education and the granting of degrees; and, although few dentists of influence and position were ranged upon its side, and those few became speedily converts to the views represented by the Odontological Society, it survived long enough to do a great deal of harm. For, when our diploma was first instituted, the College of Surgeons granted a period of grace, during which those already in practice would be allowed

to offer themselves for examination without passing through the prescribed curriculum; and, as a large number of the profession were at first opposed to the whole movement, this period of grace was allowed to elapse by a certain number, even of well-informed and respectable practitioners, without offering themselves for examination. Of course, it is impossible for them now to leave their practices and go through the necessary course of studies, so that they are, by their own original mistake, excluded from the status of recognized members of the profession. Now, however, that the success of the degree is an established fact, they have petitioned the College of Surgeons to open its gates to them once more, and although they have no one but themselves to thank for the position in which they find themselves, yet inasmuch as the regeneration of dentistry is not a thing to be done in a day, and the more we can enroll on the side of culture and education the stronger our cause will be, I think that their petition might be advantageously granted.

The dentists of England may be divided into three classes: those who, in addition to the dental diploma, hold other surgical or medical degrees; those who hold the dental diploma only, and lastly, those who, possessing no qualification, have no recognisable status, no matter what their personal qualities may be. As I have already said, among these latter are some few who are worthy of every respect, although, by their neglect to avail themselves of the opportunity when it existed, they cannot claim any public recognition as members of a learned profession.

We may rest assured that, in the long run, that class of practitioners who best fulfil their duties will thrive, to the exclusion of the incompetent, and therefore that, given sufficient time, the qualified men will become numerous enough to satisfy the requirements of the community. For the operation of that great truth, known as the law of survival of the fittest, a law which is at work as much in slowly improving political and social organizations as in modifying and bringing into fitness the forms of animals, will, sooner or later, bring about this result. But the unaided action of the laws of nature is as slow as it is sure, and it daily falls within the province of man's

intelligence to step in and hurry on, in its details at least, that slow course of improvement which we term civilization.

> "If we stand still
> In fear, our motives will be mocked or carped at—
> We shall take root here where we sit;"

Rather let us examine by what course we may obtain the end which we desire—the elevation of the dental profession.

Eventually, of course, our object is to obtain legislative interference, preventing those who hold no diploma from practising dental surgery, but the question before us is, has the time arrived for this?

Dental surgery is an eminently modern development; its past is all but a *tabula rasa*, and it may fairly be said to be a handmaid of an advanced civilization; for the time of the dental surgeon is mainly devoted to combating the effects, direct or remote, of dental caries, and this is a disease which, all over the globe, and in every epoch of time, spares the savage and seizes upon civilized man. And it is the opinion of many most competent observers that the ravages of dental caries have greatly increased within the last century, so that it is even supposed that a distinct average deterioration may be traced even in the lapse of a single generation. Thus it is that the demand for dentists has in a degree been sudden—too sudden for the want to be supplied by men thoroughly suited to the work—so that their place has been taken, to a large extent, by mere charlatans, and the dental profession has hardly had time, nor, indeed, has it possessed sufficient coherence in itself, to shake itself free from such discreditable associates. So soon as we can confidently assert that there are a sufficient number of duly educated and certificated dentists to meet the requirements of the community, the sooner we urge the necessity of legislative interference the better; but premature action must lead to a failure, which would long bar the road to further progress. Whether the time has arrived here in America for vigorous action I cannot tell, but I fear that in England we are hardly ripe for such a course, for the number of dentists holding diplomas is not yet adequate to meet the necessities of our population; and this fact is a strong argument for once more admitting,

without enforcing the curriculum, those established dentists who wish to offer themselves for examination. And even when the number of those holding dental diplomas is adequate to the population of the country, we shall have some difficulties to contend with, for there are not wanting those among our Statesmen who hold so tenaciously to the maxim "*caveat emptor*," that, for example, they regard the prosecution of tradesmen for using false weights, as an act of undesirable interference on the part of a government.

If, then, the time for restrictive legislation has not yet arrived, what is there for us at the present day to do? First, let us labor might and main at the cause of dental education, so as to render every dentist a man of such culture that he may command respect; for education is our most potent weapon.

"That there should one man die ignorant who had capacity for knowledge, this I call a tragedy," wrote Carlyle, and his pregnant words might well be applied to our own case; let us then wage war upon ignorance, in the full confidence that thus the cause of dental surgery will be best advanced. And, besides this, we must cultivate fellow feeling toward our professional brethren, so that there may be that unity without which no important step can be taken with any hope of success.

And now a few words specially addressed to those who have graduated to-day, and thus passed from the irresponsible period of pupilage into the onerous duties of professional life.

Your first feeling on entering upon private practice, will possibly be one of disappointment that the public do not sufficiently appreciate the value of the services which you render—"they use us, yet they love us not"—and they underrate the difficulties of those operations which you have, with much toil, learnt to perform; but this will be less disheartening when you reflect that this is really due to the exceedingly rapid advance of dental science, an advance so rapid that it has shot forward beyond the public ken, a state of things which we can in part correct by explaining to our patients what we can, and what we cannot, effect.

Remember that true self-respect is the first and last step toward gaining the esteem of our neighbors, and it is a thing within the grasp of each one of us; right proudly may he hold himself, whose maxim is "whatsoever thy right hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

The constant aim of each one of you must be to excel as a practitioner, and thus to compel the gratitude of your patients; and there is no duty so apparently trivial that it is not dignified by the strenuous endeavor to perform it excellently well; be "enamoured of intensity," and you will meet with a true satisfaction, the more that another has been benefitted by your exertions.

We are met together to-day to celebrate your formal admission into the ranks of the dental profession. From this hour your interests and endeavors are enlisted upon the side of education and progress, and the task before you is the elevation of that profession. Its advancement I hold very dearly at heart, and in this address I have borne in mind the maxim, "If there is anything in which you yourself feel interest, in that, or in nothing, hope to interest others;" and though I have failed to find language appropriate to the expression of my own feelings, I trust that there are many among my audience who will succeed better, not merely in talking, but also in carrying out the work of substantial progress. It does not fall to our lot to come prominently before the public; our names will never be the theme of popular adulation; but none the less can we lead lives of substantial usefulness, dignified by earnest inquiry, and striving after improvement. Let him who is at the outset disheartened and impatient, turn for comfort to the lives of the great ones of this earth, and he will find it in the words of your own poet:

Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime;
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

. . . . . .

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate,
Still achieving, still pursuing.
Learn to labor and to wait.